

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SANAA 000359

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2013

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [ETTC](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER](#) [TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: MANPADS NEA BILATERAL PLANS: YEMEN

REF: STATE 36950

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Willeah E. Cato for Reasons 1
.5 (b,d)

[11.](#) (S/NF) Summary: Yemen has taken significant steps to restrict the number of Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS) available to civilians. The ROYG has invested an estimated \$30 million in a weapons buy-back program designed to remove MANPADS, RPGs, and other weapons from the civilian arms market. While ROYG commitment appears firm, post is following up with Yemen's Defense Ministry to address key questions -- including availability of resources to sustain the buy-back effort. U.S. assistance could be important in that regard. End summary.

[12.](#) (S/NF) The ROYG clearly shares USG concerns on the control of MANPADS and is actively trying to remove stocks available to the civilian population. Particularly after the unsuccessful September 2002 shooting attack on a Hunt Oil helicopter and the al-Qaeda attempt to shot down an Israeli airliner in Kenya, ROYG is sensitive to the danger of a MANPADS attack.

[13.](#) (S/NF) During the 1994 civil war a variety of heavy weapons (antitank and MANPADS), especially those from the former Soviet Union, were available to the general population in large quantities. With the war's conclusion and the government's assumption of central control, many of these weapons (estimated in the tens of thousands) remained unaccounted for. Countless weapons, including MANPADS, were readily available from weapons souks and rural villages where tribal leaders have amassed small arsenals. These stockpiles included Strellas and Grails from Russia and the former East bloc.

[14.](#) (S/NF) Today, both government forces and certain civilian (especially tribal) elements are in possession of MANPADS. MANPADS in military control are kept in armed forces storage facilities under the direct supervision of a line commander. Yemen's civilian population overall is heavily armed, and ROYG's reach, although strong in Sanaa, remains limited in many rural areas. Nevertheless increased government regulation and the weapons buy-back program are making a difference. New procedures are in place for controlling the sale of MANPADS from weapons souks under which arms dealers/purchasers must obtain a license from the central government in order to handle MANPADS. The objective of these ROYG programs is to remove MANPADS from the civilian market wherever they are found.

[15.](#) (S/NF) At ROYG invitation, in late January 2003 Ambassador and DATT viewed a representative sample of 18 months of collection efforts from five collection sites. This sample alone included over 1000 MANPADS (Stellas and Grails) -- clear evidence of the substantive and unprecedented action being taken by the ROYG. By eliminating key weapons systems from the arms souks, ROYG reduces the quantity available to potential terrorists.

[16.](#) (S/NF) Post is actively following implementation of the buy-back program with the Ministry of Defense, as underscored in our Mission Performance Plan. Many important questions remain to be answered regarding the program's overall impact. The number of MANPADS in private hands (i.e. outside the scope of arms bazaars) is unknown, for example, as is the extent of ongoing movement of MANPADS into/out of Yemen. While ROYG commitment appears firm, the effectiveness of enforcement and availability of resources sufficient to sustain the buy-back program can only be answered over time. However, the buy-back program could be a good investment of U.S. funds, both to ensure the program's continuation, and to reiterate the strength of U.S.-Yemen cooperation.

HULL